



Editorial

John Merriman

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Nobody can say that the last six months of the 20th century have been uneventful in the world of serials.

Following hard on the heels of the announcement of the intended merger of Blackwell's Information Services and Swets Subscription Service, came the news that Dick Rowe had not only reclaimed his former empire (Faxon) but also acquired the Dawson Information Services Group, thus at one fell swoop making RoweCom one of the largest subscription agencies in the world, although he probably prefers the term 'information brokers'.

One is reminded of how Robert Maxwell eventually routed Leasco to regain control of Pergamon Press.

Some will argue that it is corporate greed that is creating the mega subscription agencies, but it would be more accurate to say it is a battle for survival.

So what in the last few years has changed a trade which historically had followed a very traditional pattern and involved many companies, large and small?

There are two key factors which have brought about the change. The first is the steady decline in the discount given to agents by the publishers, and the second is the growth of the purchasing consortia and their increasing demands for better and better terms and services, both for paper and electronic products. As a result of being squeezed on both sides, only by combining resources are the first division players able to stay in business.

The latest news that Swets has acquired Turpin Distribution Services proves that we live in

interesting times. No doubt predatory publishers will continue their activities in the new century.

One of the disadvantages of publishing *Serials* three times a year is that it is difficult to keep up to date with news items. Although we will continue the section on News, as an innovative service for our members, up to date information will also be available on our Website (<http://www.uksg.org>).

Another new service we have initiated is *lis-e-journals*, which started on 29 September 1999. A description of this can be found in the UKSG News pages.

Mergers and takeovers are not confined to the world of commerce. After a lengthy courtship and a full consultative process, the Library Association and the Institute of Information Scientists are to become one. Let us hope it is a happy marriage. The Institute of Information Scientists was founded on the premise that librarians (mainly non-graduates) only understood the covers of books and journals, whereas the information scientists (graduates) understood the contents! But times have changed for the better, and it is good news that the two organisations have united to speak with one powerful voice.

This is the last Editorial of the century, but I will refrain from millennium musings, except to wish all of those who read the Editorial – I understand there are a few of you out there – a very happy New Year. May we all in the new century ensure that the right information reaches the right person at the right time.

John Merriman